Photography Practicum: Learning the Basics of Managing a Fine Art Photography Studio

Abstract

The photography practicum provides Art and Design student researchers with the practical experience of managing a fine art photography studio. Students learn how to operate, manage, and maintain industry standard fine art archival inkjet printers as well as a fifteen station traditional black and white darkroom. This project provides essential expertise and knowledge that students, as lab monitors, both share with other students and incorporate into their own fine art practice and professional activities. Student researchers learn how to mix, store, and dispose of photographic chemistry, provide daily assistance to undergraduate and graduate photography students, and generate ideas for improvements to the lab. Students also contribute to the ongoing revision of the Photography Lab Manual, which specifies best practices and operating procedures for future photography lab monitors. The practical knowledge gained from this experience is highly valuable to colleges, universities, community colleges, artist co-ops, and professional photography labs that seek to employ individuals to manage and teach both digital and analog photography practices. This research was funded with an Undergraduate Research Fellowship.

Duties

- Mix darkroom chemistry
- Maintain analog darkroom equipment
- Maintain fine art inkjet printers
- Troubleshoot problems with printers, darkroom equipment, and Adobe Photoshop
- Assist students of varying levels of experience in their photographic education

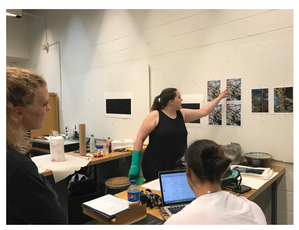
What Do I Do?

Darkroom, Black and White Print Chemistry, and Enlargers

Film Development Chemistry and Sink for Alternative Processes

Epson Stylus Pro 4800

Changing Darkroom Chemistry



Helping Student with Editing

Teaching Student to Print with Roll Paper on Epson SureColor P7000 Inkjet Printer

What Have I Learned?

- Safe maintenance of a black and white darkroom and preparation of darkroom chemicals.
- Furthered skills in troubleshooting equipment and creative problem solving.
- Acquired confidence in working in the darkroom, with fine art inkjet printers, and with photo editing software.
- Strengthened my ability to communicate highly technical methods and processes to others and help them solve problems.
- Gained experience in monitoring other students and instructing them on safe lab practices.

In this photography practicum I gained first-hand experience maintaining an analog darkroom as well as fine art printers. This involved making sure the darkroom chemistry was mixed and ready to be used and making sure the darkroom was clean and safe for use. Outside the darkroom, I helped identify and fix printer issues. This kept operations running smoothly while also encouraging students to exercise troubleshooting skills. I also worked one-on-one with students to demo different photographic processes like rolling film for development, editing in Photoshop, or printing on roll paper. I helped students “proof” their work to help them decide on future edits and cut mat board for students to show them how to professionally present artwork. I have helped future lab monitors by contributing to the photography lab manual with the knowledge I have gained.

Conclusions

This undergraduate fellowship has given me the knowledge and first-hand experience to prepare me for working in a professional photography studio. I have expertise that will make me more competitive in applications to fine art jobs or master’s programs. Aside from the increase of my own knowledge, I have helped students learn how to make professional-quality photographic prints and expand their skills in troubleshooting equipment. My contribution includes improving the quality of work made in the Department of Art and Design while instilling confidence in students when they are working with photographic processes, presenting their work professionally, and solving problems using critical and creative thinking. This fellowship has expanded future possibilities for myself and other students while furthering the mission of MSU and the Department of Art and Design.